

Feministisches Geo-RundMail

Informationen rund um feministische Geographie

Nr. 68 | Juli 2016



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Themenheft:

Qualitative Methoden und Feministische Method(ologi)en

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Regard croisé in feminist methodology: Reflections from two research projects in Honduras and South Africa

In the past decade, scholars in feminist geography have discussed different ways of ‘talking across worlds’ (Staeheli and Nagar 2002). Some scholars have reflected on the positionality of the researcher in the field (Caretta and Riaño 2016; Mollett and Faria 2016; Schurr and Segebart 2012) and in the academia (Raju 2002; Pratt 2002). Others have discussed how concepts ‘travel’ and are based on different meanings and understandings depending on the social, political and geographic contexts of the researchers and the research subjects (Nagar 2002). These studies have drawn mostly on feminist postcolonial and intersectional methodologies and emphasised the importance of participatory methods. A common aim of these contributions has been to break patterns of Northern dominance and to understand research processes from different perspectives. Such ‘multi-directional transfers’ have become a central part of knowledge production in feminist and gender studies (Wastl-Walter and Segebart 2013).

Similarly to feminist methodologies, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approaches emphasise the importance of multiple perspectives in research processes. The concept of *regard croisé*, crossed views is used in various disciplines such as history, political sciences and anthropology to exchange views between researchers in different places and disciplines. Unlike postcolonial and intersectional methodologies, the notion of *regard croisé* does not necessarily involve hierarchies but places different views in equal positions. The focus is therefore on knowledge production between researchers.

In the following I will discuss this concept based on my fieldwork in Honduras and South Africa from two perspectives: 1) the positionality of the researcher and 2) the concepts applied in research. I argue that a *regard croisé* is particularly compatible with feminist geographic analysis because it aims to break conventional hierarchies and include multiple perspectives in collaborative research processes.

Since 2010, researchers of the Swiss South African Joint Research Program (SSAJRP) have applied the concept of *regard croisé* in the project ‘Safeguarding Democracy – Contests of Norms and Values’¹. On one hand, Swiss researchers of political sciences, history and geography have studied social movements and the transformation of norms and values in South Africa. On the other hand, South African researchers have studied these phenomena in Switzerland. This approach is distinctive compared to many other North–South co-operations because it goes in both directions and provides also a ‘Southern’ perspective on ‘Northern’ research contexts. A *regard croisé* is therefore more than a comparative method—it aims to bring together positionalities and concepts of different research contexts (Meintjes and Scheidegger 2013).

I joined the project in 2014. Previously, my research focus had been Central America; my PhD thesis deals with women’s human rights activism in Honduras after the coup d’état in 2009 and the emergence of the network of women human rights defenders. In the SSAJRP project, my aim was to gain a crossed view, a *regard croisé* by interviewing women activists in urban areas who worked in feminist, women’s and human rights organisations – similar to the activists I had previously interviewed in Honduras.

¹ The project is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation SNSF and includes the Interdisciplinary Centre of Gender Studies and Institute of Geography of the University of Bern, the Centre for African

Studies of the University of Basel and the Institute of Political Studies and History Workshop of the University of the Witwatersrand.

Positionality of the researcher & concepts and understandings

As feminist scholars have shown, the positionality of the researcher affects the power relations between the researcher and the researched (Sundberg 2004). Studies have discussed ways to acknowledge and overcome these power relations and highlighted the importance of dialogues in the field instead of formal interviews. Scholars have shown how conversations facilitate researchers to interconnect their identities and political positions with interview partners (Schurr and Segebart 2012).

In my fieldwork I found that such conversations encourage us to include also reflections of our own societies into the *regard croisé*. In Honduras and South Africa, many interview partners were interested in hearing about my point of view on the interview questions and about my home country, Finland. For example, they were astounded to hear about the 'Nordic paradox': although Finland is one of the most equal societies in the world, it has one of the highest rates in domestic violence. As a consequence, these conversations often focused on the structural dimension of violence in addition to its implications in different countries.

Discussions with my South African colleagues after the interviews helped me furthermore reflect how my own positionality influenced my analysis. This exchange shifted the perspectives because they looked at my case study, Honduras, and my home country, Finland, and provided yet another *regard croisé* for the analysis. In this process, my analysis – which initially focused on Honduras – transformed and moved from Honduras to Finland and South Africa and back to my case study on Honduras.

This process has also greatly influenced the concepts I use in research. In addition to analysing the positionality of the researcher, the *regard croisé* therefore helps us reflect on the concepts and understandings in different research contexts. In 2013, I conducted fieldwork on women's human rights activism in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula and La Esperanza in Honduras. One of the main findings was that a collective identity as women human rights defenders was crucial for the emergence of collective action after the coup d'état in 2009 and prompted the establishment of a national network (Jokela-Pansini, 2016). International organisations and activists globally use the term women human rights defenders to describe women who individually or collectively organise for human rights such as land rights, indigenous rights or women's rights.

In the Swiss South African research project SSAJRP I was interested in investigating how women's human rights activists in South Africa understood the term women human rights defenders. I interviewed feminist and women's organisations as well as human rights organisations in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The NGO representatives I interviewed in 2015 were hesitant to use the concept 'women human rights defenders' in their work. One interviewee explained that while their organisation was part of an international coalition that promoted the term (the same as the National

Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras), the meaning of human rights itself was contested in South Africa. Discussions with my colleagues in South Africa confirmed this statement and made me view the definition more critically.

To conclude, *regard croisé* helps to break conventional hierarchies and include multiple perspectives in collaborative research processes. In this text I wanted to illustrate the use of *regard croisé* from two particular perspectives, the position of the researcher and the concepts and understandings applied in research. Many of us use a *regard croisé* in feminist research that is based on the interactions between 'the researcher' and 'the researched' in the field. However, reflecting consciously on the multiple perspectives we merge into our analysis, also between researchers, raises interesting issues about the positionality of the researcher and the concepts and understandings we use in feminist research.

Literature

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Nächste Feministische GeoRundMail: Ausblick und Aufruf

Die nächste Ausgabe (Redaktionsschluss: 15. September 2016) beschäftigt sich mit dem Schwerpunktthema **HEALTH MOBILITIES**.

For health and wellbeing people have been travelling since time immemorial. Yet, since recently, the mobility of bodies in search of relief from suffering, a cure or prolonged life has been intensifying and diversifying. Privatization and deregulation have been transforming healthcare into a profitable industry, in formal as well as informal and legal as well as illegal settings. This includes

- illicit and state regulated markets for fresh body parts,
- small and large scale trade in allopathic and traditional pharmaceuticals,
- the traveling of medical technologies,
- South-North and East-West migration of health professionals and caregivers,
- cross-border movements of people in need of long-term care, repeated or singular medical interventions,
- ... and many more.

Feminist research has critically examined the relations of power that produce health mobilities, the economic and emotional transactions involved and the relations of care entailed. It has been argued that health mobilities reproduce and aggravate existing gender, socio-economic and health inequalities on various scales. However, spaces and practices of agency, resistance, re-articulation are intricately interlinked with global constellations of power and privilege.

Wir freuen uns über eure Beiträge zum Thema Health Mobilities in Deutsch, Englisch, Spanisch oder Französisch. – Beiträge können Berichte über Forschungsprojekte, Seminare oder Workshops sein, rückblickend oder vorausschauend. Auch Buchbesprechungen und Hinweise auf Publikationen, und Veranstaltungen nehmen wir gerne entgegen.

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Impressum

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